

## Zechariah 2:6-13

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*Zechariah urges the Hebrew exiles to flee Babylonia because God will judge the nations that plundered Jerusalem. According to the prophet, God will restore the Judeans to their homeland and re-establish His protective presence among them. At that time, many ethnic groups will turn to God and become His people.*

In the previous section, the prophet Zechariah had a vision. He saw a young man who was about to mark out the boundaries of Jerusalem to prepare for rebuilding its walls. But before that happened, an angel told the surveyor not to do so because Jerusalem would be too great to fit within a walled city. He also informed the man that the LORD would protect the city and serve as a wall of fire around it (vv. 1–5).

In the present section, Zechariah called the Hebrew exiles to leave Babylonia. At this point in history, the Persians had defeated Babylon, and were the world power (Zechariah 1:1). Prior to Babylon, it was Assyria. All these enemies of Israel would approach from the *north*. They could all be considered as the *land of the north*, although we refer to Israel's enemies, current and future, as "Babylonia" for the purposes of this commentary.

Zechariah began with the particle, *Ho there!* In the Hebrew text, the term here is "hōy." Ancient peoples often used "hōy" as a cry of lament for the dead (Jeremiah 22:18). It is a cry of anguish or despair (Nahum 3:1; Amos 6:1). In our passage, the term "hōy" occurs twice successively to stress the calamities that would soon come on Babylonia.

This may also be a foreshadowing of Revelation 18, where God calls His people to come out of Babylon:

"Come out of her, my people, so that you will not participate in her sins and receive of her plagues."  
(Revelation 18:4b)

In this passage from Revelation, Babylon represents the exploitative world system. The world system is the constant enemy of all God's people, in all ages (1 John 2:15-16).

After the particle "hōy," the prophet urged the Judeans still in Babylonia, those who had not yet returned to the land of Judah saying, *Flee from the land of the north* (vs 6). The *north* was often the direction from which the adversaries would come against Israel. The LORD made that clear to the prophet Jeremiah when He declared, "Out of the north the evil will break forth on all the inhabitants of the land" (Jeremiah 1:14–15).

Babylonia was that enemy that had invaded Judah from the *north*. Although Babylonia was located east of Judah, on a map, all traffic flowed in an arc around the Syrian desert. Thus, the Babylonians had invaded Judah from the *north*, and the people of Judah had been exiled to

Babylonia. At this point in time, Babylon had been defeated by Persia (Daniel 5:30-31). Now the prophet was urging them to escape Babylonia as soon as possible, and return to their homeland of Judah.

Having commanded the Judeans to *flee* from Babylonia, Zechariah added the prophetic formula, *declares the LORD*. The Hebrew term translated as *LORD* is Yahweh, the self-existent and eternal God who revealed Himself to Moses out of the burning bush (Exodus 3:14). It is the covenant name of God. Thus, its use reminded the people of Judah of their covenant agreement with God (Exodus 19:8).

The phrase *declares the LORD* carries much weight in the prophetic books. It is an affirmation that the prophets speak on behalf of God. In biblical times, a prophet would receive a message from God and deliver it to the recipient (s) that God intended. Thus, when the prophet Zechariah said, *declares the LORD*, he added weight and emphasis to his message, indicating that it did not come from him. Instead, it came from *the LORD*, Judah's Ruler. Therefore, the returning exiles of Judah needed to obey the message to comply with their vow to keep their covenant agreement.

After the prophetic formula, Zechariah quoted God directly and said to the people of Judah, *For I have dispersed you as the four winds of the heavens* (vs 6). The phrase *four winds of the heavens* means in every direction. The prophet connected *the four winds* with compass points according to the direction from which they blew.

God's people were dispersed as exiles around the earth, as specified by their covenant agreement with God if they chose to break their covenant vow to follow His ways (Deuteronomy 28:64). Now God has invoked this provision of His covenant/treaty with His people, and scattered the people of Judah in all directions, dispersing them around the world. God did so to discipline them, as specified in His covenant agreement. But when His judgment was over, He urged them to come home to Judah. Again, this is as specified in God's covenant agreement with Israel (Deuteronomy 30:2-5).

Zechariah added the prophetic formula *declares the LORD* again to ensure the Judeans knew the source of his message. He then issued a second call to those Judeans who remained in Babylonia and said, *Ho, Zion! Escape, you who are living with the daughter of Babylon* (vs 7).

The city called *Zion* or Mount *Zion* is in the southeastern part of Jerusalem, which is in the southern kingdom of Judah. Sometimes, the Bible refers to it as "the city of God" because the Israelites erected a temple there to worship God (Isaiah 8:18).

Thus, *Zion* symbolized the place where God dwelt among His people. In our passage, *Zion* stands for the people of Judah, while the phrase *daughter of Babylon* likely refers to those who follow in the pride of the city of Babylon. At the point in time of Zechariah's prophecy, Persia has defeated Babylon.

But the root word translated *Babylon* in Zechariah is the same as that which is translated "Babel" in Genesis 11:9, speaking of the city of Nimrod, who built the Tower of Babel. The spirit of Babel was to assert the will of man over the will of God. The men of Babel committed to prevent

themselves from scattering among the earth (Genesis 11:4) in direct defiance of God's command to fill the earth (Genesis 9:7). So the likely application of *daughter of Babylon* here is both physical (the political successor of Babylon, Persia) as well as spiritual (the world system). The book of Revelation applies "Babylon" as a picture of the world system (Revelation 17:4).

Zechariah called those Jews remaining in Babylonia to go back to their homeland. He gave the reasons for separating themselves beginning with the prophetic expression *For thus says the LORD of hosts*. The phrase *the LORD of hosts* can also be translated "LORD of armies" and often describes God's power as a warrior leading His angelic army to defeat His foes (Amos 5:16; 9:5; Habakkuk 2:17, Revelation 19:11-20). Here in Zechariah, the phrase demonstrates God's power as the supreme warrior who has complete control over all human affairs. Indeed, *the LORD* is "the King of all the earth" (Psalm 47:7). He "reigns over the nations and sits on His holy throne" (Psalm 47:8).

In the verses that follow, Zechariah sometimes quotes *the LORD* directly to reinforce the message. To do so, he used the first-person pronoun (*I have dispersed you*). Other times, he used the third-person pronoun to report what *the LORD* had said (*thus says the LORD*). The switch in pronouns can make it sound like two speakers. But the prophet's goal was to ensure his audience knew he was God's envoy. As such, he represented God just as an ambassador represents their country today.

Zechariah began with the statement, *After glory, He has sent Me against the nations which plunder you* (vs 8). The term *glory* may be synonymous with 'vision,' indicating that God sent Zechariah to prophesy to *the nations* in the vision he saw. The Hebrew word translated *the glory* is the same as that found in vs 5 in the phrase "I will be the glory in her midst" where God is speaking of protecting His people. So this might refer back to a time when God will dwell amongst His people, and dwell in their midst.

The prophet announced that *the LORD* had sent him *against the nations* that oppressed, exploited and plundered Jerusalem. Although *the LORD* used those nations as His tools to discipline His covenant people, He would now punish them also because of their pride (Habakkuk 2:4). The prophet told the people of Judah why *the LORD* would judge the foreign nations that mistreated them: *For he who touches you, touches the apple of His eye* (vs 8).

The *apple of the eye* (pupil of the eye) represents the delicate part of the eye that lets in light (Deuteronomy 32:10). No one gets poked in the eye without reacting in a significant way. This might be saying that to oppress God's people is like poking God in the eye. In any event, it is clear that God has a special place for His people, according to His promise (Genesis 12:3; Romans 11:29). God has chastised His people, but chastises those whom He loves (Deuteronomy 8:2-3; Hebrews 12:5; Revelation 3:19).

Zechariah encouraged the people of Judah by reminding them of God's love and precious care for them. The Judeans were of extreme importance and value to God because He claimed them as His treasured possession (Exodus 19:5). He would judge *the nations* who had abused His covenant people.

Then, the prophet quoted *the LORD* to authenticate what he had stated regarding the LORD's judgment upon the nations. He began with the particle *behold*. The particle *behold* is often used to describe an event that is about to take place. In this case, it focuses attention on the statement that follows it. The speaker would use the term *behold* to focus on an event that would surprise the listeners. It thus draws attention to the message.

After the particle *behold*, *the LORD* through Zechariah declared, *I will wave My hand over them so that they will be plunder for their slaves* (vs 9). The phrase translated *wave My hand* also appears in Job 31:21, where it is translated "lifted up my hand" and refers to doing harm. God will do so much harm to the nations who plundered His people that *they will be plunder for their slaves*. They will be so devastated that those who used to serve (*their slaves*) them will now be plundering them.

Thus God made it so that the plunderer became plunder for Judah (Habakkuk 2:7-8). This once again illustrates the biblical principle that we reap what we sow, and how we treat others will determine how God will judge us (Matthew 7:1-2; Galatians 6:8).

When this action came to pass, Zechariah stated, *you will know that the LORD of hosts has sent me* (vs 9). That means the people groups (like the Babylonians) would acknowledge Zechariah as a true prophet of the LORD because this word has come to pass. It is likely another way to assert that this word will, most certainly, come to pass.

While Judah's oppressors would suffer at the hands of God, Judah would live securely. Thus, *the LORD* invited her to celebrate: *Sing for joy and be glad, O daughter of Zion* (vs 10). The term *daughter* implies that *the LORD* is a loving father. He loved His covenant people and cared for them because they were His children (Deuteronomy 14:1). The phrase *daughter of Zion* stands for the people of Jerusalem, and likely represents all the people of Judah. It speaks of the gracious loving relationship *the LORD* established with His covenant people (2 Kings 19:21). Such a relationship prompted *the LORD* to urge His children to sing with joyful hearts, because their ultimate deliverance is certain.

*The LORD* gave the reasons for the command. In doing so, He introduced the terms *for behold* to draw attention to the message, thereby preparing the hearts of the people to hear what He was about to say. Then, He declared, *I am coming and I will dwell in your midst* (vs 10). God's presence produces peace of mind and security in the lives of His people.

Wherever He dwells, there is well-being, prosperity, and comfort because He is the source of all good things (1 Corinthians 8:6). He will live among His covenant people to protect them from the enemy threats and bless them beyond measure. There will come a day when the LORD will come to dwell with Judah in person. This may initially take place during the time when Jesus will dwell upon the earth for a thousand years (Revelation 20:4-6). It will also take place during the new heaven and new earth, when God will dwell upon the earth, in His full expression of glory (Revelation 21:22-23).

Zechariah employed the prophetic expression *declares the LORD* to reinforce the divine promise. Through this statement, he reminded his audience that the revelation came directly from

God. Therefore, the promise that God will dwell among His covenant people is a guarantee since *the LORD* is a faithful God (Deuteronomy 32:4).

Furthermore, the prophet Zechariah stated, *Many nations will join themselves to the LORD in that day and will become My people. And I will dwell in your midst* (vs 11). The words *many nations* refer to Gentiles. Many Gentiles from *many nations* will have a relationship with God.

Like Judah, these Gentile nations will turn to the LORD, thus fulfilling the promises of the Abrahamic covenant (Genesis 12:1–3). This is already taking place spiritually, as faith in Jesus has spread to the Gentiles (Romans 11:11). It will ultimately take place physically as well (Zechariah 8:23; Revelation 21:24).

God will dwell among the Gentile nations, and also grant them security and peace, as God will *dwell in the midst* of the Gentiles. These Gentiles will also *become My people*. When the Gentiles become God’s people, Zechariah declared, *You will know that the LORD of hosts has sent Me to you* (vs 11). The fulfillment of this prophecy is certain, and will authenticate the prophet’s commission as the LORD’s emissary.

Although many nations will turn to God, Judah and Jerusalem will still have a preeminent position. For, on that day, *the LORD will possess Judah as His portion* (vs 12). The term translated as *portion* is “chēleq” in the Hebrew language. It comes from a root word meaning “to divide” or “to apportion.” The root speaks of giving or receiving the portion (usually of land) coming to someone by law and custom.

In the Pentateuch (the first five books of the Bible) God stated that the Levites would have no *portion* of land among the Israelites (Numbers 18:24). They were not to do any secular job. Instead, they were “to stand before the LORD to serve Him and to bless in His name” (Deuteronomy 10:8). That is why they were to receive tithes and offerings from the other tribes as their primary source of sustenance (Deuteronomy 10:9; 12:12).

Because the Suzerain (Ruler) God chose Judah (and Israel) as His treasured possession, He will exalt them (Exodus 19:4–6; Deuteronomy 32:9). He had planned it from the beginning. The Jewish people had the privilege of being in a covenant relationship with the true God. As such, they will be His *portion in the holy land*. This indicates that Israel will have a special position with God in His kingdom which is to come.

The phrase *holy land* signifies that the *land* of Jerusalem will be set apart for God. It will be *holy* because God will dwell in it. At that time, He *will again choose Jerusalem* (vs 12). This likely means that Jerusalem will be the site of God’s physical presence as it once was (Psalm 9:11; Joel 3:17). He will restore His fellowship with His believing people in *Jerusalem*. He will *choose Jerusalem* as His special place from which to reign. This will likely take place initially during the thousand year reign of Christ (Revelation 20:4-6). But it will certainly take place in the new earth, where there will be a new Jerusalem that is described as being “as a bride” (Revelation 21:2).

The prophet Zechariah concluded this passage with a powerful declaration: *Be silent, all flesh, before the LORD* (vs 13). To *be silent* in the presence of *the LORD* means to show reverence to Him, to stand in awe of Him and listen and act upon what He has to say. This act describes the appropriate response of someone who has recognized the LORD's power and awesomeness (Habakkuk 2:20; Zephaniah 1:7). The prophet placed the words *Be silent* at the beginning of the sentence to emphasize the importance of the command to listen to Him.

The invitation to *Be silent before the LORD* was for *all flesh*, that is, for everyone. Every person should stop and listen, and recognize God's majestic power and dominion over the earth. To do so is to neglect the essence of reality itself, for all that is stems from and depends upon God (Colossians 1:16-17). All humanity needs to recognize that God's justice is not asleep.

*For He is aroused from His holy habitation* (vs 13). The phrase *holy habitation* refers to God's dwelling place in heaven. The book of Deuteronomy clarifies the meaning of the phrase *holy habitation* by placing it side-by-side with the phrase "from heaven" (Deuteronomy 26:15). God is *aroused* because injustice and exploitation has been applied to His people. Therefore, He will judge all the nations. However, those who listen have the opportunity to also become His people. If listened to, this presents a compelling proposition: don't listen and be judged, or do listen and become a part of His special people.

In the Psalms, the psalmist David also declares that "the LORD's throne is in heaven" (Psalm 11:4). In both instances, the Bible makes it clear that the LORD rules from heaven. Here in Zechariah, the prophet told his audience that *the LORD* is *aroused* from heaven. This emphasizes that He is upon His throne, and has the power and authority to execute all He has proclaimed.

The verb translated as *be aroused* means "to excite," in the sense of becoming active. In the Psalms, the sons of Korah lamented by soliciting God to become active: "Arouse Yourself, why do You sleep, O Lord? Awake, do not reject us forever" (Psalm 44:23). Similarly, Zechariah portrayed *the LORD* as becoming active after a time of passivity. Even though it may seem that *the LORD* is slumbering, it is not so. He will arise to take action, but in His own timing, out of His compassion that all come to repentance (2 Peter 3:9).

## **Biblical Text**

**<sup>6</sup> "Ho there! Flee from the land of the north," declares the LORD, "for I have dispersed you as the four winds of the heavens," declares the LORD.<sup>7</sup> "Ho, Zion! Escape, you who are living with the daughter of Babylon."<sup>8</sup> For thus says the LORD of hosts, "After glory He has sent me against the nations which plunder you, for he who touches you, touches the apple of His eye.<sup>9</sup> For behold, I will wave My hand over them so that they will be plunder for their slaves. Then you will know that the LORD of hosts has sent Me.<sup>10</sup> Sing for joy and be glad, O daughter of Zion; for behold I am coming and I will dwell in your midst," declares the LORD.<sup>11</sup> "Many nations will join themselves to the LORD in that day and will become My people. Then I will dwell in your midst, and you will know that the LORD of hosts has sent Me to you.<sup>12</sup> The LORD will possess Judah as His portion in the holy land, and will again choose Jerusalem.**

**<sup>13</sup> "Be silent, all flesh, before the LORD; for He is aroused from His holy habitation."**